

A BRIEF MEMOIR  
OF  
REV. GILES FIRMIN,  
ONE OF THE  
EJECTED MINISTERS  
OF 1662.

---

By JOHN WARD DEAN,  
~~REV.~~ PRESIDENT OF THE PRINCE SOCIETY.

---

BOSTON:  
DAVID CLAPP & SON, PRINTERS.....334 WASHINGTON STREET.  
1866.

*J. Bone*



A BRIEF MEMOIR  
OF  
REV. GILES FIRMIN,  
ONE OF THE  
EJECTED MINISTERS  
OF 1662.

---

By JOHN WARD DEAN,  
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE PRINCE SOCIETY.

---



BOSTON:  
DAVID CLAPP & SON, PRINTERS.....334 WASHINGTON STREET.

1866.

A COURT REPORT



REV. GILES WILSON

TO THE HONORABLE SENATE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS  
IN SENATE, JANUARY 18, 1881.  
REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF THE  
LANDS AND MINES, FOR THE YEAR  
1880.  
ALBANY: J. B. LEECH, STATE PRINTER.  
1881.

MASSACHUSETTS  
JANUARY 18, 1881

HAVING been lately engaged in preparing a memoir of Rev. Nathaniel Ward, compiler of the Massachusetts Body of Liberties and author of several quaint productions that were published at London during the last years of Charles I., I was necessarily led to make investigations into the history of his son-in-law, Rev. Giles Firmin, a controversial writer of considerable repute, in his day, among the Nonconformists of England. His chief work, the *Real Christian*, was held in esteem by our New England fathers in the last Century, and Cotton Mather applies to it the epithet, "golden." The result of these researches was embodied in the following article, which was printed in the *New-England Historical and Genealogical Register* for January, 1866. The type set for the *Register* has been used to print a few copies, in pamphlet form, for presentation to friends.

J. W. D.



## A BRIEF MEMOIR OF REV. GILES FIRMIN.

---

THOUGH the reputation of Rev. Giles Firmin, as a writer and a divine, was gained in England, and though in that country he was born, yet we in New England have an interest in his history; for here, in Massachusetts, in the infancy of our colony, his early manhood was spent. Here, too, he married his wife—the daughter of one whose memory is still fresh among us.\* Nor did his interest in the affairs of New England cease when he left our shores, as is shown in his writings and by other evidence. A correspondence was for many years kept up by him with the ministers and other prominent men in Massachusetts.

He published at least fifteen different works; but only one of these, his *Real Christian*, has, we think, been reprinted in this country; nor have we been able to find in public libraries here, or in the collections of our friends, more than five of the others.

The limits to which we shall be restricted in this article will only allow us to present the results of our investigations in the briefest possible form. His biography, if written with all the fulness of detail that the subject is capable of, would possess deep interest; for his lengthened life was passed amid remarkable and rapidly changing scenes.

He is said to have been born in 1614 or 1615,† in the County of Suffolk, England;‡ but his birth was probably not earlier than the latter date. His father was Mr. Giles Firmin, “a godly man, an apothecary of Sudbury, in England,”§ who afterwards came to Massachusetts, and in October, 1633, was chosen deacon of the church at Boston, where he died previous to October 6, 1634, being selectman of the town at his decease.|| It has generally been asserted that both father and son came to New England in 1630, in the fleet that brought Winthrop and his company—but the latter did not probably come so

---

\* Rev. Nathaniel Ward, author of the *Simple Cobbler of Agawam*, and compiler of the *Body of Liberties*, “the first code of laws established in New England.”

† Eliot's *Biog. Dict.*, art. Firmin. Felt states that “he died in April, 1697, in his eighty-third year.”—*History of Ipswich*, p. 74.

‡ Calamy's *Life and Times of Baxter*, p. 243.

§ Winthrop's *Journal*, Vol. i.; 2d ed. p. 114, 3d ed. p. 136.

|| Boston Town Records, *in loco*.

soon ; for he was certainly a fellow-passenger with Rev. John Wilson, on one of the return voyages of that divine to New England,\* and the probability is, that this was in 1632, when Mr. Wilson brought his wife to her new home.

Giles Firmin, Jr., was here before October 11, 1632, as his admission to the First Church of Boston, which bears no date, was entered before that day.† He is said by Calamy to have studied at Cambridge under the tuition of Dr. Hill ;‡ and perhaps he returned to his native country for that purpose. This conjecture is strengthened by the following extract from the Real Christian, by which it appears that he was “ far distant ” from his father, in the fall of 1634, when the latter died. Of a religious duty, which he omits to name, he says :

“ I called to mind that my own Father, during the time I lived with him (unless it were on the Lord’s day) did not perform the duty, what he did after I cannot well tell ; but yet he was a man who kept his secret communion with God, had a heart for God, and a tongue for God, (as sometimes being a Gown-man in a corporation, he had occasion to appear for God) while he lived in the world, was above the world ; when he came to leave the world, he would several times send up short prayers to his Father, When wilt thou send thy Servant to fetch me home ? With a smiling countenance he entertained Death, having some fore-tastes of what he was going to possess, by that expression of his, I shall have as much glory as ever I can bear. • When he was dead, his Minister who wrote to us the news of his death, said this of him, *He lived much desired, he died much mourned for.* Yet this my godly Father would scarcely be esteemed for a serious Christian by some, for not performing that duty according to the question, though I suppose, a year or two before his death he did take it up, but then I was far distant from him.”§

If, as seems probable, the son returned to England, after joining the church at Boston, it is possible that he first came in 1630, as generally stated ; and that the voyage to New England, in which he was a fellow-passenger with the Rev. John Wilson, may have been in the summer of 1635, when that clergyman came for the last time to the new world.|| In an auto-biographic paragraph, which we shall again have occasion to quote, he uses this language :—“ Being broken from my study in the prime of my years, from eighteen years of age to twenty-eight, and what time I could get in them years I spent in the study and practise of Physick in that Wildernes til these times changed, and then I changed my studies to Divinity.”¶

---

\* Firmin himself makes this statement : “ Mr. Phillips Pastor of the Church in Watertown, while Mr. Wilson Pastor of the Church of Boston was here in England, went to Boston and administered the Lord’s Supper to that Church. I was not then in the Country, but I heard of it soone after, when I went over with Mr. Wilson.”—*Separation Examined*, pp. 62-3.

† MS. Records of First Church, Boston.

‡ Calamy’s Baxter, p. 243. An account of Rev. Thomas Hill, D.D., will be found in Brook’s Puritans, vol. iii. pp. 170-3. Firmin, himself, speaks of “ My Reverend Tutor, Doctor Hill.” See Real Christian, Boston ed. p. 26.

§ Real Christian, pp. 314-15.

|| The reason why we incline to the opinion that it was in 1632, and not in 1635, that he was a fellow-passenger with Mr. Wilson, is that Mr. Phillips would not be so likely to administer the Lord’s Supper, at Boston, during Mr. Wilson’s last absence, when Mr. Cotton was Teacher of the Church, as during his first absence when the Church was left without a minister.

¶ A Serious Question Stated. Address, To the Reader.

The expression, "broken from my study," may or may not refer to University study. From the age at which his studies were interrupted, there can be little doubt that it was the death of his father that put a stop to them. From this event to his return to England there is an interval of ten years, the same interval that there is between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight, when he says he was broken from his study. If he was between the ages of eighteen and nineteen when his father died, and between the ages of twenty-eight and twenty-nine when he returned to England, he could not have been born earlier than 1615.

He was certainly in New England in March, 1637-8, for he was present when Mrs. Hutchinson was excommunicated from the Boston Church,\* which was on the 22d of that month.† Calamy says that he was present at the Synod held on occasion of the Antinomian troubles, and "afterwards wrote in defence of the Ministers."‡ This synod was held in the autumn of 1637, at Newtown, now Cambridge.§ Firmin gives some particulars relative to Mrs. Hutchinson's excommunication. Rev. Thomas Edwards had stated in a Sermon at Colchester, that "when they excommunicated Mrs. Hutchison, because her own sonne did not joyne in the casting out of his own mother, he was likewise censured."|| Mr. Firmin replies to this:—

"The story doth something concerne the head I am upon, and therefore I make bold to insert it here. I was a little troubled at the passage, knowing well how things were carried, being present at that time, and so tooke occasion some few weeks after, to give a bare narrative how the thing was carried, with so much meeknesse, I am sure none could accuse me. The summe is this. When all wayes according to the word had been tryed with Mrs. *Hutchison* to recall her, but none would prevaile, the question was put to the Church to manifest consent to her excommunication; but her sonne and sonne-in-law (one more than Mr. *Edwards* mentioned) stood up to put some stop in the way (had they sate still, as any body would have expected, though they had suspended their votes, I know not who would have spoken one word to them). Mr. *Cotton* rose up, and gave them a grave admonition, that though their naturall affection might now worke, for which he did not blame them, yet he would not have them preferre their mother before Christ, nor hinder their mother from that Ordinance, which might be a meanes to save her soule; with these words they both sate downe; they never had any other censure (if this be a censure) and the Church proceeded to her excommunication. Now I appeale unto all, to judge where was the tyranny in this act? Yet though I carried this with all mildnesse, this was the onely cause why Mr. *Edwards* raked up all he could against me, and put it into print, even such things as were never in my thoughts."¶

On the fourth of January, 1638-9, he was granted by the "freemen of Ipswich," one hundred acres of land "near Mr. Hubbard's farm,"\*\*

\* Separation Examined, p. 102.

† Winthrop's Journal, vol. i.; 2d ed. p. 257, 3d ed. p. 309, where will be found an account of Mrs. Hutchinson's excommunication.

‡ Calamy's Baxter, p. 243.

§ Winthrop's Journal, vol. i.; 2d ed. p. 237, 3d ed. p. 284.

|| Separation Examined, pp. 101-2.

¶ Separation Examined, p. 102.

\*\* New England Hist. and Gen. Register, vol. iv. p. 11.

on condition of his living there three years.\* Mr. Hammatt informs us that he also possessed a "planting lot" of six acres on which he built a house, where he resided, which was purchased, after his return to England, by William Goodhue, the ancestor of the extensive family of that name.† On the 22d of May, 1639, he was admitted freeman of Massachusetts.‡ He had probably, before this time, removed to Ipswich, where he practised as a physician.

The date of his marriage to Susan, daughter of Rev. Nathaniel Ward, has not been ascertained, but it was before December 26, 1639. He had thought, as early as this, of studying divinity and giving up medicine which he did not find remunerative.§ At a later date he was advised by Gov. Winthrop to remove to the Bay;|| but he apparently continued to practise his profession at Ipswich during his residence in this country.

The General Court, at the session that began December 10, 1641, appointed him clerk of the writs for the town of Ipswich, with power to grant summons and attachment in civil actions,¶ which office he held till June, 1642, when he was succeeded by John Whipple.\*\*

Having "long inhabited" at Ipswich, he was dismissed Feb. 25, 1643-4, from the First Church at Boston, to the church at the former place.†† About the same time several other members, who had resided some time in other towns, were dismissed to their respective churches.‡‡ This was probably owing to a decision of the New England Elders, of which he gives the following account in his Reply to Mr. Cawdrey:—

"It was," he says, "the practice of divers of us in *N. E.* at the first planting we did joyne our selves to this or that Church; afterwards when other Plantations were erected, for convenience of dwelling (the former Plantations being too full) we would remove and dwell there, retaining still our membership in those churches to which we first joyned, and by vertue of it, having letters of recommendation, did partake of the Sacraments in those churches where we lived, and hence many members lived many miles, twenty or sixty from their own churches, and from the inspection of those officers who had power to call them to account, and observe their Conversations, and yet would partake of the Sacraments six or eight yeeres together in another Congregation: but this indeed he [Mr. Hooker] opposed, in so much that when I came away the Elders would not suffer it any longer."§§

It is, undoubtedly, to his residence at Ipswich, while he was a member of the Boston church, that he refers in the same work, when he says: "I have had three of my children baptized by ministers who never looked on me as a member of their church, though I dwelt in their Town."|||

\* Felt's Ipswich, p. 74; Hutchinson Papers, p. 109.

† New England Hist. and Gen. Register, vol. iv. p. 11.

‡ Massachusetts Colony Records, vol. i. p. 376; N. E. Hist. and Gen. Reg., vol. iii. p. 96; Winthrop's Journal, vol. ii.; Appendix K.

§ Hutchinson Papers, p. 109.

|| Massachusetts Hist. Coll., vol. xxxvii. p. 275.

¶ Massachusetts Colony Records, vol. i. p. 345.

\*\* Ibid., vol. ii. p. 14.

†† MS. Records of First Church, Boston, *in loco*. And yet by the town records of Ipswich, according to Felt, he was an Elder of the church at I., Nov. 3, 1642.—See *Hist. of Ipswich*, p. 74.

‡‡ MS. Records of First Church, Boston, *in loco*.

§§ Sober Reply to Mr. Cawdrey, p. 28.

||| Sober Reply to Mr. Cawdrey, p. 20.

In the autumn of 1644, he left New England to return to Europe; but probably not with the intention of remaining there permanently. He left his family behind, we presume in charge of his father-in-law; and embarked in the *Seafort*, which sailed for Malaga on the twenty-third of November, 1644, or in her consort whose name Winthrop does not give.\*

The *Seafort* was a ship of more than four hundred tons, and was built at Boston, by Capt. Thomas Hawkins. On account of her strength, many who were going to England preferred taking passage in her to going direct in a weaker vessel. They arrived near the coast of Spain in December. One evening "some of the company supposed they saw land: yet they sailed all night with a fair gale, and, towards the morning, they saw a light or two which they conceiving to have been some ships, either Turks or others, they prepared their ships and stood towards them."†

About one o'clock the ship in which Firmin was a passenger struck upon the rocks. The seamen must have considered the situation very perilous, for he tells us that some of them shouted that they should be "in Hell before morning."‡ Three hours before day, both ships had grounded; and they soon broke in pieces.§ At the very time, when he was in extreme danger of being drowned, a little child of his, about four years old, then with her mother and the rest of the family in New England, lay crying out, at times, through the night, "My Father, My Father," and would not be pacified. This moved his relatives to pray heartily for his safety.|| Nineteen persons were drowned; but he and the rest of the passengers and crew were saved.¶

Although the ships at first grounded two or three miles from the shore, they were thrown by the sea near the dry land before they fell in pieces. The place where they were wrecked was five miles from Cadiz.\*\* In the morning the people of the island plundered the vessel and even took away from the passengers some plate which they had saved: but when they arrived at the city they were treated kindly. They went there naked and barefoot as they had been frightened from their cabins, and the Spaniards received them into their houses and clothed them.

The master of an English ship which happened to be in the roads, Mr. Mariot by name, received as many of the shipwrecked people as his ship would stow, and clothed many of them with his own clothing.†† Mr. Firmin, however, seems to have remained in Spain till the

\* We assume that Mr. Firmin sailed in one of these two vessels whose shipwreck Winthrop records, for various reasons, among which these may be named:

1. Mr. Firmin in sailing from New England was shipwrecked on the coast of Spain, in the month of December, and in the latter part of the night; all of which circumstances agree with those related by Winthrop of the two vessels.

2. The two vessels were wrecked in December, 1644; so was Mr. Firmin's ship.

3. The two vessels were wrecked near Cadiz; Firmin mentions visiting San Luear, which is only eighteen miles from Cadiz. There are so many concurring circumstances that there is little room for doubt.

† Winthrop's Journal, vol. ii.; 2d ed. pp. 238-40, 3d ed. pp. 292-3.

‡ Firmin's Real Christian, p. 80.

§ Winthrop's Journal, *ubi supra*.

|| Calamy's Baxter, pp. 243-4; Nonconformist's Memorial (ed. 1778), vol. i. p. 518.

¶ Winthrop's Journal, *ubi supra*.

\*\* Winthrop writes it, "Cales," according to the custom of the time. See Drake's Old Indian Chronicle, p. 13.

†† Winthrop's Journal, vol. ii.; 2d ed. pp. 239-40, 3d ed. pp. 292-3.

following spring. He speaks of having visited the town of San Lucar de Barrameda, and of going farther up the Guadalquivir, and we know of no other time when he would be likely to visit those places.\*

He had returned to England by the next summer, as Robert Harmer, apparently a Presbyterian clergyman, writing from Colchester, under date of August 1, 1645, mentions Mr. Firmin's preaching in that town on Wednesday, July 30, 1645.† The following extract from Mr. Harmer's letter is printed by Rev. Thomas Edwards :—

“ REVEREND SIR,

Since my last, I went on Wednesday to hear Mr. *E.* to make good his challenge ;‡ but when I came he Preached not ; but one out of *New England*, one Mr. *F.*, a stranger in this Town, came to confute you in point of Story. He left us to judge whether the Presbytery was not an unjust Domination : but for your saying they admitted not of Appeal, he utterly denied it before the people, and told us many stories of their Synods by way of counsel. He cited Mr. *N.*§ for a Sermon he Preached, how near the Independents and Presbyterians were come : He cited him again, that he should say, and Mr. *W.*|| that the Assembly had granted to every Congregation an entire power within itself. They carry things before the people, as if they had no Adversaries, but some few rash men. But in conclusion, he exhorted to peace, and said they desire peace, they must have peace, and they will have peace ; yet Prophecyng of a second Civil War, and that there was death in our pot. I desire you to communicate to these Divines, how we and they are abused ; these things are unsufferable. *Dura mihi opus est patientia in tanta rerum dissolutione.* Dear Sir, The Almighty God uphold our Spirits in these broken times.”¶

Another letter from Mr. Harmer without date, gives an account of a Sermon by Mr. Ellis, concluding his examination of Mr. Edwards's statements. The writer proceeds : “ Since the Preaching of Mr. *F.*'s Sermon (Iesuit like) they desire a peace, and would have us propound two Ministers and they would propound two ; but the Friends that came to see you, gave Mr. *E.* the inclosed *Quæries*, and said they knew I would treat with them, if they would Answer these *Quæries* under their hands, but they refused to do it.” The writer then gives four queries, headed : “ Quæries put to some Independents of *C.*

---

\* “ If such a one writes of the River that goeth up to *Sevil* in *Spain*, and tells me, when you get over the bar which lieth at the mouth of the River, on the Star-board-side, as you sail up, there stands a Castle, higher stands the Town of Saint Lucar, higher another Castle, and a Monastery by it, higher the Chappel *Bonance*, and still on the Star-board-side, this man saith true : But doth he know these as I (though I do not deserve the name of a Traveller) do, who have been in the Town, in the Castle, in the Chappel, and seen them ? ”—*Real Christian*, p. 32.

† This was the stated Fast ordered by Parliament on the last Wednesday of every month. For the strictness with which this Fast was kept, see Neal's Puritans (Boston, 1817), vol. iii. pp. 66-8. The monthly fast in December, 1644, falling on Christmas day, Parliament ordered that the festival should give way to the fast.—*Ibid.*, p. 181.

‡ Rev. Mr. Ellis, of Colchester, an Independent Minister, who is here referred to, is mentioned in some of the previous letters. In one written July 29, three days before this, an attempt of Mr. Ellis on the preceding Sabbath to confute some of Mr. Edwards's statements, is reported.

§ Probably Rev. John Norton, then of Ipswich, N. E.

|| Perhaps Rev. John Wilson, of Boston, N. E.; possibly Mr. Ward.

¶ Edwards's Gangrena, Part. i. p. 101. We would acknowledge our obligation to George Brinley, Esq., of Hartford, Ct., for calling our attention to these letters.

upon an occasion of a Sermon Preached by Mr. *F.*, an Independent Apothecary Physician, sometime Servant to Dr. *Cl.* of London.”\*

Under date of August 14, 1645, Mr. Harmer writes :

“DEAR FRIEND,

I writ you in my last of a new Lecture ; it is to be kept by Mr. *F.*, an Apothecary Physician of *New England*, who is not in orders, nor ever Preached as he confesseth, but on Shipboard as he came over. Yesternight Mr. *E.* and Mr. *F.* desired to speak with me, and Mr. *E.* broke the businesse to me, how necessary it was they should Preach controversies no more ; that they desired nothing but peace, and the glory of God in this. To which I answered, That Mr. *W.* and himself had behaved themselves most politickly, craftily, with fair pretences, until they got possession of our Churches, and then played their pranks ; and told them how, and in what they and all their party had deluded us with fair words. We will not be fooled any longer : I see we are neerly bought and sold with Equivocations and Dissimulations of this party : You know their Spirits : God give me patience.”†

The first part of *Gangræna*, in which these extracts were printed, was published in the latter part of February or early in March, 1645-6. Mr. Ellis soon after denied the statements relative to himself and his brother, writing thus to a friend in London : “The asperitions cast on me, and some others here by Master *Edwards*, are as false as foule ; which because they are a great part of his Book and strength,‡ those who are here concerned in it, will, if God please, shortly make Reply.”§ Mr. Edwards, in answer to this, prints a letter he had received from Harmer, dated April, 1646, in which the latter says : “Concerning those Letters I writ you from *Colchester*, I have them attested under the hands of many sufficient witnesses, each particular that is material being averred by three witnesses at least, and those of piety and judgement.”||

Five years later Mr. Firmin himself denies most of the charges brought against him by Mr. Harmer. In the preface to *A Serious Question Stated*, published in 1651, Mr. Firmin, in replying to them, furnishes a bit of his autobiography, as follows :—

“Now to give an account to the reader why I appear in Print, [being conscious to myself of my owne weaknesse, being broken from my study in the prime of my years, from eighteen years to twenty-eight, and what time I could get in them years I spent in the study and practise of Physick in that wildernes til these times changed, and then I changed my studies to Divinity.]

The reason, I say, of my appearing in print is this. I being branded by Mr. Edwards for an Independent in the first part of his *Gangrene*, where there is one whole letter concerns me, and that is all false, being merely mistakes ; the next letter (half of it) concerns me also,

\* Edwards's *Gangræna*, Part i. pp. 100.

† Ibid., p. 101-2.

‡ Mr. Edwards, in the Second Part of his *Gangræna*, thus replies to Mr. Ellis :—“The things I relate of Master *Ellis*, or some others of *Colchester*, in *Gangræna* are not false (though Master *Ellis* saith they are foule) neither are they a great part of my Book and strength, but a small little part, not the twentieth part of my Book.”—Page 99.

§ Cretensis, page 44. quoted in Edwards's *Gangræna*, Part ii. page 54.

|| *Gangræna*, Part ii. p. 55.

and [excepting that I preached and was not in orders], that also is false, I believe the Gentleman that wrote those Letters, if they were now to be written, would not do it. . . . But being branded by him thus, and so others looked upon me, when I was ordained, I did declare to the Elders and the Congregation, how far I owned *Independency*, that is, *That a Church Organized and walking regularly, might execute all the power of the Keyes within itself.*"\*

Mr. Firmin reverts to the charge of being an Independent in a later work. "What some may think of me," he says, "when they find me in Mr. Edwards gang amongst the *Independents*, and now read this, I know not. Possibly they will say either Mr. Edwards wrote what is false, or that I am changed from my principles (as some have said), but I assure the Reader, I am not gone back, nor advanced one step in these controversies, from what I ever manifested in those times when those letters were sent to Mr. Edwards."†

He resided at Colchester as late as July 1, 1646;‡ and the winter after his family probably joined him. Colchester suffered a severe siege§ in 1648, being held for King Charles, and besieged by the Parliamentary Army. Whether Mr. Firmin was there at the siege or left before, we do not learn. In 1651, he had removed to Shalford, in the same county, and was settled as the minister of the church there.||

It will be noticed that he admits the charge against him, made by Mr. Harmer, that he preached before he was in orders, to be true. His ordination, he tells us, was delayed because the Congregational ministers of Essex were unwilling to impose hands, and he would not be ordained without that ceremony.¶ Finally he was ordained by the Presbyterians.\*\* "If any," he says, "shall object against me, my preaching so long without ordination, I answer: 1. I never contemned the Ordinance. 2. I would never have come into a Pulpit, if I had not intended to have been ordained. 3. I did endeavor to have some Ministers to Ordaine me, two years before I could obtain it, because of troubles. 4. The reason why I did delay it was, because I would have it in the place where I was chosen, and not in another place from my people, which I apprehended not to be so regular."††

In one of his books, he gives this account of the services when he was ordained: "For my owne Ordination, it was in the face of my people, the day was spent in fasting, and Prayer, those who carried on the worke were Mr. Dan. Rogers, Mr. Marshall, Mr. Ranew, with other godly Ministers, who joynd with them in the imposing of hands (the ministers lived about me) I never saw that Ordinance carried on with more solemnity in my life, the people showed their election by suffrage, holding up their hands; all was done according to the Pattern."‡‡

\* Address "To the Reader" prefixed to A Serious Question Stated.

† Firmin on Schism (published in 1658), pp. 28-9.

‡ Massachusetts Hist. Coll., vol. xxxvii. pp. 276-7.

§ In the Simple Cobbler, Mr. Ward says: "All the Counties and shires of England have had wars in them since the Conquest, but Essex, which is onely free, and should be thankful."—Page 27 of 1st ed. Essex, it will be seen above, did not enjoy this distinction much longer.

|| Title page of A Serious Question Stated.

¶ Firmin on Schism, pp. 119-20.

\*\* Sober Reply to Mr. Cawdrey, p. 7; and Presbyterian Ordination, title page and preface.

†† A Serious Question Stated, Address, To the Reader.

‡‡ Separation Examined, p. 37.

While the opponents of Episcopacy were in power, Mr. Firmin had defended the validity of ordination by bishops,\* but on the restoration of that form of church government, he found his own ordination called in question by its advocates. In replying to his Episcopal assailants, he gives another account of his ordination, containing a few additional particulars, as follows :—

“According to the Talent the Lord hath lent me, I wrote a little in defence of Episcopal Ordination, so far as to prove it not to be Antichristian: But now the controversie is come home to my own door: for though in the presence of the people who elected me, with their hands lifted up to manifest their Election, in a day of Fasting and Prayer, I was by five Ancient, Godly and Grave Divines (the greater part eminent in their Generation) set apart to the work of the Ministry by Imposition of Hands, Prayer and words suitable to the Ordinance, yet my Ordination is questioned by such in whose defence I wrote before (thank you Brethren); the ground being this, they judge Ordination to be a work proper to a Bishop, whom they make an Officer distinct from Presbyters, having more *eminent Offices* and *greater power* belonging to them than the Presbyters have.”†

Calamy, in his *Life and Times of Baxter*, gives a biographical sketch of Mr. Firmin, in which it is said that, “when he was near upon forty Years of Age, he was Ordain’d by Mr. *Stephen Marshall*, of *Finchingfield*, and other Ministers,” at Shalford.‡ The expression, “near upon forty years of Age,” must not be taken too literally. He was evidently ordained before his *Serious Question Stated* was published, and this appeared in 1651. He was then not far from thirty-six years old.§ Though “ordained by the Presbytery,”|| Mr. Firmin states that he never took the Covenant.¶

In the preface to his *Presbyterial Ordination Vindicated*, published in 1660, he asserts that he had upheld the cause of the king, during his exile, as far as was consistent with prudence. “Some of us,” he says, “were so imprudent [knowing the tempers of our Congregations which could say heartily, *Amen*] to pray publickly for him in his lowest condition. The prison had witnessed it, had I not a friend who delivered me: and this year, had not his *Majestie* been restored, it had been proved, by being threatned to my face, and the threats often repeated. That as sure as God was in the heaven, I should be called into question, only for praying for the Royall Family: If any desire other Proofs of Loyalty to his *Majesty* in his low condition, I could give them, but I spare to name them. Such *Subjects* had his *Majesty* among the now despised Presbyterians, who had they not been *faithfull* and *loyal* to his *Majesty* [as they were bound to be by the *Solemn Covenant*] but would have closed with the Army, doubtless they could have carried such a Party with ’em, that I believe as yet our *King* had not set upon his *English Throne*, nor had the voice of Thanksgiving for his restoring been heard in our *Iland*.”

\* In his *Separation Examined*.

† *Presbyterial Ordination*, p. 2.

‡ Calamy’s *Baxter*, p. 244.

§ Elliot (*Biographical Dictionary*, art. Firmin) and other authorities erroneously make him full “forty years” old when ordained.

|| *Sober Reply to Mr. Cawdrey*, p. 7.

¶ Preface to *Presbyterial Ordination Vindicated*.

Mr. Firmin, in 1652, writing of his parish, states that "the strongest Party in the Towne is religious."\* In the same work, he calls it "a small Village, where the maintenance will not keep one Minister."† Eight years after, he speaks of it as a "poor Viccaridge" which afforded him but "half the maintenance" for his family.‡ He continued at Shalford, "a painful Labourer in the Work of the Ministry," Calamy tells us, "till he was turned out with others of his Brethren. After his Ejection the Church Doors were shut up for several Weeks, nay Months; and God had no Publick Worship there, because he could not conform to the Ceremonies. And he Complains, it was so also in several other Places, in his Question between the *Conformist* and *Non-conformist* truly Stated, and briefly Discuss'd; in an Answer to Dr. *Faulkner*, Page 29."§

Upon the Indulgence in 1672, he with Rev. Daniel Ray, of Ridgwell, in Essex, about 7 or 8 miles from Shalford, set up a meeting at the former place. The next year Mr. Ray removed to Burstall in Suffolk,|| but Mr. Firmin continued at Ridgwell till his death.¶

"He practis'd Physick for many Years," says Calamy, "and yet was still a Constant and Laborious Preacher, both on the Lord's Days and Week Days too; saving that once a Month there was a Sermon in the Church, at which Time he was an Auditor there. And he held on thus, in the hottest part of King *Charles's* Reign, having large Meetings when so many other Meetings were suppress'd. He had one considerable Advantage above his Brethren, which was the *Favour* and *Respect* which the Neighbouring Gentry and Justices of Peace had for him, on the Account of their using him as a Physician. He was extremely respected indeed by all; for there were none but he was ready to serve them; and of those he took the Care of, he was tender, and yet would take but little, tho' the Physick was of his own preparing. The Poor applying themselves to him, had often both Advice and Physick too for nothing; and of those who were more able, he took but very moderate Fees; whereby he lost the Opportunity of getting an Estate, which had been a very easie Thing.

He was a Man of strong Constitution of Body, and liv'd in much Health, till above Fourscore. There appear'd little Decay of Parts or Vigour in him, to what is usual in Persons of such an Age. He lay but a little while Sick; being taken Ill on the Lord's Day Night, after he had Preached Twice; and the *Saturday* following he Dy'd, in *April*, 1697. He was a man of excellent Parts and a General Scholar; for besides his Skill in Physick and Chyrurgery, and other Sciences subservient both to them and Divinity, he was eminent for the Oriental Tongues, well read in the Fathers, Schoolmen, and Church History, and the Controversies with *Papists*, *Socinians*, *Arminians*, &c. Tho' he was one of eminent Holiness and Zeal for God's Glory, and most sincere and plain-hearted in the whole Course of his Conversation, yet he was exercis'd with various Temptations, and was in very perplexing Fears as to his Spiritual Estate;

\* Separation Examined, p. 45.

† Ibid., p. 71.

‡ Preface to Presbyterian Ordination Vindicated, published in 1660.

§ Calamy's Baxter, p. 244.

|| Palmer's Nonconformist's Memorial, vol. i. pp. 517-18.

¶ Calamy's Baxter, p. 244.

which had this Effect upon him, that they made him very Humble and Meek (tho' naturally a Man of a very great Spirit) and careful in his Preaching and Writing, as not to encourage Hypocrites, or embolden any in Sin, so neither to Create any causeless Trouble in truly gracious Persons. And herein lay much of his Excellence. In his Life he had much spiritual Trouble; but in his death he had much Comfort. Then he told those about him, how he had been Converted when a School Boy, by Mr. *John Rogers*, of *Dedham*. He went late on a Lecture-day, and Crowded to get in. Mr. *Rogers* taking Notice of his Earnestness, with a Youth or Two more, for Room, with his usual Freedom cry'd out, Here are some Young ones come for a Christ. Will nothing serve you but you must have a Christ? Then you shall have him, &c.; which Sermon made such an Impression upon him that he thence Dated his Conversion.

He was a Man of a Publick Spirit; not Rigid and Morose, but of great Moderation. He went about doing Good, and therein was his chief Delight. He was a Man of Peace, and his Loss was generally lamented all the Country round."\*

Palmer says that his reading upon religious controversies was particularly of "those between the Episcopal Party, the Presbyterians and the Independents. His judgment was that there ought to be more elders or presbyters than one in a church, instancing 8 churches mentioned in scripture, wherein there were divers elders, viz., *Jerusalem, Rome, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Coloss, and Thesalonica*; besides those general texts that speak of many churches, *Acts* xiv. 23. *Tit.* i. 5. He thought also that one of these elders was, in the apostles' time, primate and president among them for order's sake, during life; and that from the abuse of this constitution arose prelacy, and at last the pope. He esteemed imposition of hands essential to ordination. But he most excelled in practical divinity, especially in directing a sinner how to get peace with God, and how to judge of his state."

Mr. Crofton says that he was "a Man no less approved for his Learning, Modesty, Piety, and Zeal for the Unity of the Church, and his Anti-separation in the Days of its Prevalency and Prosperity, than for his Loyalty and Fidelity to the King's Majesty in the Days of his Distress."

From Calamy's works and other sources, we obtain this list of Mr. Firmin's publications:—

1. A Serious Question Stated, Whether Ministers are bound by the Word of God, to Baptize the Children of all such Parents which say they Believe in Jesus Christ, but are grossly Ignorant and Scandalous in their Conversations, &c. 4to. 1651.
2. Separation Examined, or A Treatise in which Separation from the Ministry and Churches of England are weighed and found too light, &c. 4to. 1652.
3. A Sober Reply to Mr. Cawdrey, in Defence of the Serious Question Stated. 4to. 1653.
4. The Questions between the Conformist and Non-conformist truly Stated and briefly Discuss'd; in Answer to Dr. Falkner, and the Friendly Debate.
5. Establishing against Shaking: Or, a Discovery of the Prince of Darkness,

\* Calamy's Baxter, pp. 244-6.

† Nonconformist's Memorial (ed. 1778), vol. i. pp. 518-19.

‡ Preface to "Mr. Firmin's Liturgical Considerator Considered," 4to. 1661, quoted in Calamy's Continuation, vol. i. p. 459.

(scarcely transformed into an Angel of Light) powerfully now working in the deluded People call'd Quakers. 4to. 1656.

6. The Power of the Civil Magistrate in Matters of Religion vindicated: A Sermon of Mr. Marshal's, with Notes of Mr. Firmin's. 4to. 1657.

7. A Treatise of Schism, Parochial Congregations in England; and Ordination by Imposition of Hands, in Answer to Dr. Owen of Schism, and Mr. Noyes of New England's argument against Imposition of Hands in Ordination. 8vo. 1658.

8. Presbyterian Ordination Vindicated, In a Brief and Sober Discourse concerning Episcopacy, As claiming greater Power and more eminent Offices by Divine Right than Presbyterie. The Arguments of the Reverend Bishop Dr. Davenant in his Determination for such Episcopacy are modestly Examined, and Arguments for the Validity of Presbyterian Ordination added. With a brief Discourse concerning Imposed Forms of Prayer and Ceremonies. 4to. 1660. (Calamy gives the date 1661, but a copy in the Massachusetts Hist. Society's library is dated 1660.)

9. The Real Christian, or a Treatise of Effectual Calling. 4to. 1670. This work was reprinted at Boston, Mass., in 8vo., 1742.

10. The Plea of Children of Believing Parents for their Interest in Abraham's Covenant, their Right to Church Membership with their Parents, and their Title to Baptism: In Answer to Mr. Danvers. 8vo. 1683.

11. Scripture-Warrant sufficient Proof for Infant Baptism: A Reply to Mr. Grantham's Presumption no Proof. 8vo. 1688.

12. An Answer to Mr. Grantham's vain Question put to, and charg'd upon Mr. F—, (in his Book intit. The Infant's Advocate) viz.: Whether the greatest Part of dying Infants shall be damned. 4to. 1689.

13. Some Remarks upon the Anabaptists' Answer to the Athenian Mercuries. 4to.

14. A brief View of Mr. Davis's Vindication: And Remarks upon some Passages of Mr. Crisp. 4to.

15. Weighty Questions discussed. 1, About Imposition of Hands. 2, About Teaching Elders, and the Members meeting in one Place. 4to. 1692.

Mather, in his *Magnalia*, Book iii., Appendix to Chap. xiv., gives an extract from a work by Firmin published in 1681.\*

A Sermon which is said to have been preached by him before Parliament and the Westminster Assembly, is quoted as follows:—"I have lived in a country seven years,† and all that time I never heard one profane oath, and all that time never did see a man drunk in that land."‡ This is the only allusion we have met with to Firmin's having preached before Parliament, and we do not find the sermon in any list of his publications.

\* George Brinley, Esq., of Hartford, Ct., has a copy each of the *Serious Question* and *Separation Examined*; John Carter Brown, Esq., of Providence, R. I., has a copy of the latter work. The Massachusetts Historical Society has a copy each of the *Reply to Mr. Cawdrey* and *Presbyterian Ordination*; the Boston Athenæum has the *Treatise of Schism*; and Charles Deane, Esq., of Cambridge, has the 1670 edition of the *Real Christian*. The Boston reprint of the *Real Christian* is not very rare.

† If any reader of this memoir knows of copies of any of the other works of Rev. Giles Firmin, in this country, he will confer a favor by communicating the fact to the writer.

‡ This is a shorter period than Firmin has generally been supposed to have lived in New England. Perhaps only his residence at Ipswich is meant.

† Felt's *Ecclesiastical History of New England*, vol. ii. pp. 48-9; the late A. Hammatt, Esq., of Ipswich, in *Hist. and Gen. Register*, vol. iv. p. 11. Cotton Mather gives a similar saying in a sermon before Parliament and the Assembly, without naming the preacher, in *Wonders of the Invisible World*, Sect. 1 of *Enchantments Encountered*, and *Magnalia*, book i. p. 37; but he evidently quotes from memory in one or both cases, as the language varies. If it were not for the positive assertion of Messrs. Felt and Hammatt, we should be inclined to attribute the saying to Hugh Peters, who speaks in two of his works of his seven years' residence in this country, and who, we know, preached before Parliament. We have not been able to find a copy of Peters's sermon.

Mr. Firmin's father-in-law, Rev. Nathaniel Ward, reports a like experience in twelve years. See his *Simple Cobbler*, 1st ed., p. 61; Pulsifer's ed., p. 67.



